

011A

RELEASE 12-13 NX

HONG KONG (UPI)--A HONG KONG NEWSPAPER REPORTED THAT TWO AMERICANS IMPRISONED IN CHINA SINCE THE KOREAN WAR AS ALLEGED SPIES WERE BEING RELEASED BY CHINESE AUTHORITIES AND WERE EXPECTED IN HONG KONG TODAY.

A SPOKESMAN FOR THE U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL SAID HE HAD "NO COMMENT" ON THE REPORT IN THE STAR, AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TABLOID DAILY.

"WE HAVE INSTRUCTIONS NOT TO COMMENT ON THIS MATTER," THE SPOKESMAN SAID. "OUR INSTRUCTIONS ARE THAT ALL COMMENT ON THIS MATTER MUST COME FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON."

IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS AT THE LOWU BORDER STATION, WHERE THE TWO PRISONERS--JOHN DOWNEY, OF NEW BRITAIN, CONN., AND RICHARD FECTEAU OF LYNN, MASS.,--WOULD CROSS IF THEY ACTUALLY HAVE BEEN RELEASED, REFERRED QUERIES TO THE U.S. CONSULATE. HOWEVER, A SPOKESMAN FOR THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES SAID THE TWO MEN HAD NOT CROSSED THE BORDER.

DOWNEY AND FECTEAU, BOTH CIVILIANS WORKING FOR THE U.S. ARMY DURING THE KOREAN WAR, WERE CAPTURED IN NORTH CHINA IN NOVEMBER 1952. AFTER THEIR PLANE DISAPPEARED, THE STATE DEPARTMENT SAID THE PLANE WAS ON A "REGULARLY SCHEDULED" FLIGHT FROM KOREA TO JAPAN BUT THE CHINESE SAID IT WAS ASSISTING ESPIONAGE AGENTS THE TWO MEN ALLEGEDLY ESTABLISHED IN MANCHURIA.

THE CHINESE ACCUSED THEM OF BEING AGENTS OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA) AND TRIED THEM BY A MILITARY TRIBUNAL IN 1954. DOWNEY WAS SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT AND FECTEAU WAS GIVEN 20 YEARS.

MARY DOWNEY VISITED HER SON IN HIS PEKING PRISON LAST MONTH. SO DID HIS BROTHER WILLIAM.

WHEN SHE RETURNED TO HONG KONG SHE SAID DOWNEY'S SENTENCE WAS BEING REVIEWED AND THAT HE FELT HIS CHANCES FOR COMMUTATION "WERE GOOD."

"AT THE END OF OUR VISIT, JACK TOLD US THAT HE HAD BEEN INFORMED BY THE PRISON AUTHORITIES HIS CASE WAS BEING REVIEWED TO DETERMINE WHETHER THEIR POLICY OF LENIENCY MIGHT BE--HE MIGHT BE RELEASED RATHER THAN SERVE OUT HIS SENTENCE. THE PRISON OFFICIALS TOLD JACK THAT AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN DECIDING TO APPLY LENIENCY WAS THE PRISONER'S BEHAVIOR WHILE IN PRISON AND THAT THEY CONSIDER THAT HIS BEHAVIOR HAS BEEN GOOD," MRS. DOWNEY SAID.

"WE HAVE NO ASSURANCE THAT JACK WILL BE RELEASED NOR, IF SO, WHEN. BUT JACK SAID THAT HE DID NOT THINK THE PRISON OFFICIALS WOULD TELL HIM ABOUT THIS POSSIBILITY AND THEN HAVE HIM IN TURN TELL IT TO US UNLESS HIS CHANCES WERE GOOD," MRS. DOWNEY SAID.

WILLIAM DOWNEY SAID HIS BROTHER ONLY TOLD HIM AND HIS MOTHER ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS OWN RELEASE AND DID NOT MENTION FECTEAU. ALTHOUGH THEY SAW FECTEAU DURING THE VISIT, THEY DID NOT DISCUSS THIS MATTER WITH HIM BECAUSE IT WAS ONLY AT THE END OF THEIR TRIP THAT JOHN DOWNEY TOLD THEM ABOUT THE REVIEW OF HIS OWN SENTENCE.

AC1248AES